

CLASSIC FILMS FOR TEENS

By Matt Pierard, Creative Commons Non-Commercial
Copyright 2018



Kate Hepburn as Jo March in *Little Women*

A Little Princess (1995)

Sara Crewe is a wealthy but kind-hearted school-girl who is forced into servitude when her soldier father goes missing. Purists may opt for the Shirley Temple original but Liesl Matthews' performance and the update to WWI-era NYC are improvements. Alfonso Cuarón's beautiful art direction and cinematography make this more magical.

A Member of the Wedding

Julie Harris plays tomboy heroine Frankie to Ethel Waters' no-nonsense housekeeper in the deep south. Frankie's soldier brother is getting married and in order to participate, she's going to have to wear a dreaded dress.

A Summer Place

Sandra Dee and Troy Donahue have a forbidden romance that parallels their respective parents' (Dorothy McGuire and Richard Egan) affair. Children of divorce may identify with the younger lovers.

A Tree Grows In Brooklyn

Dorothy McGuire is a tower of strength in turn-of-the-century NYC as mother to budding intellectual daughter, played by Peggy Ann Garner. Co-starring Ted Donaldson as Garner's

bratty kid brother, and James Dunn as their alcoholic father.

Adventures in Babysitting

Elisabeth Shue plays title suburban sitter on a wild road trip into the city with her charges (aged about 7 - 12) and her near-sighted bestie, who has a hilarious scene in a bus station.

Anna to the Infinite Power

Young teen (Martha Byrne) discovers she has multiple identical twins in this subtle science fiction story that plays like a tamer precursor to the classic *X-Files* episode, *Eves*.

Au Revoir, Les Enfants

1987 French film set in Catholic boys school during WWII where a few Jewish teens have been hidden won Best Foreign Film Oscar. Accurate view of boys becoming men.

Belles on Their Toes

This sequel to the original (and accurate) version of *Cheaper By the Dozen* (below) focuses on the career of hardworking mother of 12, Myrna Loy.

Bend It Like Beckham

British teen soccer fan (Parminder Nagra) has a talent for the sport, despite her strict Hindu upbringing. As she falls for her coach (Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), a rift develops between she and her bestie (Keira Knightly) for the young man's affections..

Boy's Town

Mickey Rooney's selfish punk grows up by way of Spencer Tracy's tough priest. (Pictured, last page).

Breaking Away

Exactly what it's like to be an aimless nineteen year-old boy in late 70's Indiana. A must-see for high school grads. Stars include Dennis Christopher, Dennis Quaid, Daniel Stern, and Jackie Earle Haley.

By the Light of the Silvery Moon

One of a pair of Doris Day musicals set in Indiana of the 19-teens, based on the Penrod stories of Booth Tarkington.



Captains Courageous

Spoiled brat Freddie Bartholomew (pictured) learns about life on a New England fishing boat by way of a kindly Portugese played by Spencer Tracy.

Charlotte's Web (70's)

Original cartoon version of E.B. White tale set in a farmyard full of talking animals. The animation quality is middling but the voicework (Henry Gibson as Wilbur the pig, Debbie Reynolds as Charlotte the spider, et al) and songs are entertaining.

Cheaper by the Dozen

The original (and more accurate) version about a real-life married pair of efficiency experts (Clifton Webb and Myrna Loy) and their large brood of kids, including Jeanne Crain. Watch her deal with her dad's prudish attitudes towards beachwear and the boys she dates.

Crooklyn*

Starring Alfre Woodard, and set in 1970's Brooklyn, a black family copes with money problems, growing kids, and parental arguments. Some strong language but this is a pretty wry look at the period, complete with deliberate screen distortion during a trip to the country.

Dead Poet's Society*

Set in a 1950's prep school, Robert Sean Leonard is featured as teenager who's torn between following his theatrical desires and pleasing his uptight, but loving father. Robin Williams stars as the boy's flamboyant English teacher. Ethan Hawke, Josh Charles, and Lara Flynn Boyle play Leonard's pals.

Empire of the Sun

Based on a true story, Christian Bale plays an upper-class British boy who is separated from his parents and sent to a Japanese concentration camp in an arid region of China. As the boy gradually becomes a young man, he struggles to retain memories of his past life.

Explorers

Adolescent trio (River Phoenix, Jason Presson, and Ethan Hawke) build spaceship, by way of provided alien technology. Creative tale has witty nods to pop culture, and a few exciting moments.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off*

80's teen classic starring Matthew Broderick, Mia Sara, and Alan Ruck. This has some adult themes but provides the ultimate joyride lesson on how to play hooky in style.



Flipper

Set in early 60's Florida, this follows a pair of teen boys (Luke Halpin, pictured with Flipper) in a coastal community and their friendship with a young dolphin.



Four Daughters (and 3 sequels)

Series of stories (the rest being *Daughters Courageous*, *Four Wives*, and *Four Mothers*) starring the Lane sisters (Priscilla pictured) and Gale Page about a middle-class California family, from the mid-1930's to the early 40's. Times may have changed but the problems of teen sisters haven't all that much. Among their beaux are John Garfield, Frank McHugh, and Dick Foran.

Foxes*

Four girls, including Jodie Foster and Cherie Currie, spend a hectic 24 hours in 1980 Los Angeles. One is involved with a 20-something music producer (Randy Quaid) who should know better. Currie has a drug problem and careless parents. Foster's single-mom (Sally Kellerman) is trying to improve their lives going back to college.

Freaky Friday

Original '70's production where hip teen Jodie Foster and her harried mom, Barbara Harris, exchange personalities via weird phenomenon.

Friendly Persuasion

Young Anthony Perkins, on the verge of manhood, must decide whether to follow his family's Quaker pacifism or join the Union army in the Civil War.

Great Expectations

David Lean's production of Dickens' classic about a dirt-poor young boy who becomes a successful man via mysterious benefactors.

Teenaged Jean Simmons plays the young Estella.

Hairspray

John Waters' only PG-rated film is probably his best in terms of commercial appeal. Plump teen Tracy Turnblad lives in early 1960's Baltimore with her chubby mom (Divine) and novelty-store-owning dad (Jerry Stiller). She longs to fit in with the cool kids via a local TV dance show. Story effortlessly blends in civil rights elements via the era's increasingly popular r'n'b music.

Heaven Help Us*

Early 60's teens (played by Andrew McCarthy and Mary Stuart Masterson) fall in love, despite complicated atmosphere of the times. He's Catholic, she's not; his grandmother wants him to become a priest; she runs her family business. Supporting cast (including a foul-mouthed Kevin Dillon) provide the humorous adult themes with sexual obsessions; film is rated R, but look for the TV-cut version.

Hoosier Schoolboy

Mickey Rooney plays title youth in late 1800's Indiana, based on characters created by Edward Eggleston. Touches on themes of rich versus poor, and labor movement, along with first love.

Imitation of Life

This can be either the original 30's version with Claudette Colbert, or the 50's remake with Lana Turner. Each is about a career-minded single mother aided by a loyal black housekeeper, each of whom have teenage daughters. While the white girl sails through life with relative ease, her light-skinned best friend struggles with racial identity. A must-see for Mother's Day movie binges.

I Remember Mama

The 'dramatic one' is a teen girl (Barbara Bel Geddes) in 1912 San Francisco, who lives with her Norwegian family in a lower middle-class townhouse. She yearns to be a writer and has

to learn the hard way that what is around her -- her hard-working mother (Irene Dunne) and her colorful extended family -- is more interesting than her vivid imagination.

Ladybug, Ladybug*

A group of early 60's New England schoolchildren, ages 10-15, believe that the world is coming to an end via a false alarm. As the adults in the community learn the truth, they strive to gather up the kids before they do something foolish. May frighten sensitive folks.



Lassie Come Home

A boy's beloved collie dog is sold by his impoverished Scottish farmer dad to make ends meet. Title star has other plans in this sort of road-trip movie for kids. Roddy MacDowell (pictured, with Lassie) and Elizabeth Taylor co-star.

Little Women

Kate Hepburn glows in one of her finer early roles as Jo March, tomboy eldest of four girls, led by their devoutly Christian mother, Marmee. Most of the mush is cut from this version, but some may find it sticky going. Remade twice (so far); the lavish, less-sticky 90's version is the better (the other being a lame '49 musical with June Allyson), starring Winona Ryder as Jo, Susan Sarandon as Marmee.

Lucas

Coming-of-age story features Corey Haim in title role (his best) as teen nerd who falls for more sophisticated fellow student. Winona Ryder plays a fellow outcast who has a crush on him.

Matinee

Teenage boy in early 1960's Florida spends the summer falling in love at the movies, where a creative entrepreneur (John Goodman) is showing a gimmicky sci-fi film. Surprise ending adds to the Cold War theme of the era.



Meet Me In St. Louis

Delightful family musical set in 1903 Missouri, based on the memoirs of screenwriter Sally Benson. One of Judy Garland's signature roles, this also launched lovable child star, Margaret O'Brien (pictured, with Garland), as her often naughty kid sister.

Mermaids

Winona Ryder plays Cher's older daughter in this 60's-set dramedy about an eccentric single mother. Ryder, who longs to be a nun despite her Jewish roots, is conflicted by her romance with convent caretaker Michael Schoeffling.

Mildred Pierce*

This can be the Joan Crawford original, or the cable remake starring Kate Winslet. Main story revolves around self-made businesswoman Mildred and her relationship with spoiled-

rotten teen daughter (Ann Blyth in the original; Evan Rachel Wood in the remake). The 40's version is rated PG, the recent one definitely rated R, more suitable for older teens.

My Side of the Mountain

Adolescent city boy decides to spend a year on his own, trekking into the Canadian wilderness and living off the land to get away from his bickering parents. Two friendly adults slowly urge him to reunite with his worried folks.



National Velvet

Tween Elizabeth Taylor (pictured, with Rooney) falls in love with a wild horse and Mickey Rooney, as an itinerant trainer, helps her tame him, then enter both into a race. Angela Lansbury co-stars as Taylor's older sister.

Now, Voyager*

Although this is an adult romance classic, older teen girls may identify with the put-upon heroine (Bette Davis), her cruel niece (Bonita Granville), and her beau's neurotic tween daughter.

On Moonlight Bay

The other Doris Day film based on Tarkington's Penrod stories. Both feature Day's young adult romance with college boy (Gordon MacRae) and Billy Gray's goofy kid brother.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

Charlotte Coleman stars as isolated British teen who develops crush on fellow schoolgirl,

despite her strict religious upbringing. Her fight to gain independence becomes the film's focal point.

Ordinary People

Timothy Hutton won an Oscar as tormented son of suburban socialites Mary Tyler Moore and Donald Sutherland in this intense family drama. Elizabeth McGovern co-stars as Tim's free-spirit neighbor who helps pull him out of his shell.

Paper Moon*

Set in the Depression-era early 30's, a tween orphan girl and her ne'er-do-well dad -- Tatum and Ryan O'Neal -- make their way across the Midwest to her aunt's house. Episodic tale, shot in sepia-tone, has adult moments with the dad's trashy girlfriend (a hilarious Madeleine Kahn) and a couple of violent bootleggers.

Peyton Place*

Although the film, a huge hit in the late 1950's, stars Oscar nominee Lana Turner, much of the focus is on her teen daughter (Diane Varsi) and her budding romance with neighbor boy (Russ Tamblyn). A family tragedy involving their housekeeper's daughter (Hope Lange) results in a dramatic courtroom scene. Both of the younger actresses were also nominated.

Pretty In Pink*

Nice girl Molly Ringwald, who lives a lower-class life with her depressed dad, falls in love with wealthy Andrew McCarthy. He loves her too but each of them have jealous friends who keep trying to keep them apart. Language is rough at times, so a TV-cut might be advisable.

Racing With The Moon*

Sean Penn and Elizabeth McGovern play young lovers in WWII-era small California town. Their sweet romance is paralleled with the less-successful affairs of his wild buddy (Nicolas Cage).

Roughly Speaking

Based on a true story of Louise Randall Pierson, this dramedy follows the ups and downs of a

creative family from the pre-WWI to pre-WWII era of American life. Rosalind Russell and Jack Carson play the parents, and while the focus is mainly on them, the kids do their part to keep them on track.

Running On Empty*

60's campus radicals (Christine Lahti and an occasionally foul-mouthed Judd Hirsch) drag their teen sons from town to town to escape authorities. In their current situation, the older boy (River Phoenix) experiences his first romance, with the daughter (Martha Plimpton) of his music teacher. When his folks need to leave town, the young hero -- a piano prodigy, like his mom -- is torn between loyalty and his own growing adulthood.

Sister Act 2

Whoopi Goldberg aids nun pals from *Sister Act* by revving up inner-city San Francisco Catholic school brats into first-rate choir. Lauryn Hill co-stars as snotty rebel with much-needed soulful alto. Terrific musical performances uplift stale script.

Sounder

Sharecropper's family in 30's South strive to keep it together when the father (Paul Winfield) lands in jail for petty theft. Cicely Tyson is the desperate mother, Kevin Hooks her plucky tween son. *Sounder* is the family's prized hunting dog.

Spencer's Mountain*

Henry Fonda and Maureen O'Hara lead a large brood of children in a small Wyoming mountain village. Based on Earl Hamner's future *Waltons* franchise, half the film looks at the romance of the couple's eldest son (James MacArthur) and his wealthy longtime girlfriend (Mimsy Farmer), as each begin their trek to college. Adult elements include Farmer's slightly-sizzling lust for her beau, and the town tramp's relationship with an older man.

Splendor in the Grass*

Teen lovers Natalie Wood and Warren Beatty struggle with their emotions in 1920's Kansas small town. Wood's heroine ultimately has a nervous breakdown and her return to sanity via a long stay in a psychiatric facility is well-handled.

Stand By Me*

Quartet of adolescent boys (Jerry O'Connell, River Phoenix, Wil Wheaton, and Corey Feldman) in early 1960s Maine go on an eventful weekend trek to see a dead body. This is based on a Stephen King short story so there's the adult element; also some talk about sex, and also a couple of abusive parents. Includes elaborate fantasy about a pie-eating contest that might gross some people out.



Stars In My Crown

Fact-based story of post-Civil War era preacher (Joel McCrea), his pretty wife (Ellen Drew) and their adopted adolescent son (Dean Stockwell, pictured) in a small Midwestern town. The town's sole black man (Juano Hernandez) becomes the boy's stand-in grandpa, as he has for dozens of other now-grown -- and incredibly disloyal -- men. Christian themes abound as McCrea lays on some serious Protestant guilt to townspeople, including old war buddy Alan Hale & his sons.

Summer School*

Mark Harmon plays lazy teacher who'd rather be having fun in the California sun but has to do tour of duty at title job to retain employment. Enter roomful of teen equals, including an

unwed mother, a pair of horror film fanatics, a sleepy jock, an annoying nerd, and most disturbingly, a pretty surfer girl with a crush on him. A wonderfully-wry Kirstie Alley co-stars as fellow teacher and potential love interest.

The Bad Seed

Oscar-nominated Patty McCormack plays the evil tween 'heroine' Rhoda of this chiller set in a suburban neighborhood. Eileen Heckart is the heartbroken, drunken mother of one Rhoda's victims. As the girl's anguished mother realizes what kind of a child she's raised, things slowly come to a zenith.

The Bells of St. Mary's

Ingrid Bergman delights as young nun who works with parish full of rambunctious teen boys, helped along by priest Bing Crosby. Boxing scene where Bergman teaches boy how to defend himself is especially entertaining.

The Black Stallion

Tween boy (Kelly Reno) traveling with cardsharp dad solely-survives boat sinking with title wild beast, who leads him to a desert island. Gradually, the two become friends, the boy learning to ride the animal. After both are rescued and returned to 1940's San Diego, the boy lives with his now-widowed mom Teri Garr, and the horse winds up at stables owned by elderly Mickey Rooney. Of course there's a big race around the corner.

The Book Thief

In the early days of WWII, a German family hides a Jewish teen for a few months. After she helps him escape, their tween daughter enjoys her first romance with a neighbor boy. She also becomes the title petty thief, by way of a kind-hearted wealthy woman whose disenchantment with her Nazi-appeasing husband has depressed her.



The Day the Earth Stood Still

Better original version of story about an alien (Michael Rennie, pictured, with robot pal Gort) who comes to Earth to warn us to play nice with each other -- or else. Billy Gray is featured as leading lady Patricia Neal's curious tween son. Good object lessons about kindness, tolerance, and loyalty abound.



The Diary of Anne Frank

Based on the actual diaries kept by tragic title heroine in WWII-torn Holland, Millie Perkins (pictured) is touching as teen Jewish girl dealing with terrible situation as she and her family hide from Nazis.

The Five Thousand Fingers of Dr. T

Wild fantasy based on script by Theodore Geisel (AKA Dr. Seuss) about a young boy's reluctance to learn how to play piano. No teens here but creative art direction and offbeat songs, with Hans Conreid as mad scientist of a Svengali make this interesting viewing for adventurous young adults.

The Heart is A Lonely Hunter

Carson McCullers tale of misfit, plain-jane teen (Sondra Locke) in mid-1960's south and her platonic friendship with deaf-mute boarder Alan Arkin.

The History Boys*

Set in an early 1980's British high school, the title heroes attend a college prep course led by an obese sentimentalist who has an unfortunate desire for his students. The boys deal with this issue in a range of ways, from eye-rolling acceptance to faith-based retribution. Meanwhile, their own romantic issues come into play in parallel ways.

**The Homecoming**

Christmas-set story launched the Waltons on television. Patricia Neal stars as Olivia, Andrew Duggan as John, and Richard Thomas (pictured) originates his classic John-Boy Walton character, along with his younger siblings.

The Lady in White

Young boy (Lukas Haas) and older brother (Jason Presson) encounter title tragic figure in early-60's New England village. Engaging ghost story has tragic themes but it's tame enough for most family viewing. Really captures the era with detailed production.

The Learning Tree*

Set in Depression-era Kansas, and based on the director (Gordon Parks)'s own youth, the story focuses on black teenager (Kyle Johnson) and his struggle to stay good despite his rowdy pals. A scene of seduction in the opening reel and a brutal act of murder are the adult themes, albeit handled in PG terms.

**The Miracle Worker**

A teenaged Patty Duke is amazing as blind and deaf-mute real-life heroine Helen Keller (pictured, with Duke) opposite Anne Bancroft as her dedicated teacher. Essentially an expansion of the original stage-play, this is a powerful experience for history buffs and drama lovers alike.

The Parent Trap

This can be the Hayley Mills original or the updated Lindsay Lohan romp; both deal with twin girls who don't meet until their divorced parents unwittingly send each to summer camp. One of the rare cases (i.e. Little Women - 30's and 90's) where the modern remake is just as good as the original version.

The Red Shoes

Aspiring ballerinas adore this fantasy of magic spell-induced dancing redhead Moira Shearer torn between two lovers. One of the most successful British imports of its day.

The Secret Garden

Avoid the modern version for this wonderful classic starring Margaret O'Brien and Dean Stockwell. Both cousins have lost their mothers to tragic circumstances, though he still retains his father, albeit a bitter one, played well by Herbert Marshall. The girl brings the boy out of his shell via the title locale, which they tend with a local boy. Psychological overtones, a common theme in post-war films, play out nicely in this drama, which has tension-breaking moments of humor.

The Sound of Music

Perennial chestnut about ex-novitiate (Julie Andrews) turned nanny who falls in love with wealthy Austrian employer (Christopher Plummer) at beginning of WWII. With Charmian Carr as the daughter who's 16 going on 17. Other teen siblings are played by Nicholas Hammond and Heather Menzies. Wonderful songs and on-location shooting enlivens sometimes syrupy story.



The Sundowners*

Irish couple (Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr, pictured) travel across Australia with their teenaged son (Michael Anderson Jr) as sheep-herders in the mid-1920's. Along the way, they pick up a crusty Englishman (Peter Ustinov) who doubles as the boy's reluctant mentor. Earthy dramedy includes spontaneous fist-fights, heavy drinking, and lusty romance between the parents, and Ustinov with man-mad hotelier Glynis Johns.

The Swiss Family Robinson

John Mills and Dorothy McGuire lead brood to safety on deserted island in this Disney classic. Creative examples of making do with local materials highlight the action.

The Trouble With Angels

Hayley Mills stars as rambunctious teen who is forced to attend Catholic school run by seemingly-mean Rosalind Russell. Several great pranks lead to surprising conclusion.



The Wizard of Oz

Judy Garland shines as Kansas girl who dreams of magical fairyland. Aided by an offbeat group of new friends, she's off to see the Wizard as all valiantly try to avoid the Wicked Witch (Margaret Hamilton, pictured, with Garland).

The Year My Voice Broke*

Australian coming-of-age tale about misfit (Noah Taylor) and his complicated friendship with fellow teen romantic couple. He has a crush on the girl but she prefers her manlier beau.

The Yearling

Engaging family drama filmed on location in Florida is set after the Civil War and focuses on struggling farming couple (Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman), and their lonely young son (Claude Jarman, Jr.), anxious for a pet of his own. One day, an orphaned fawn comes into his life and he is overjoyed for many months -- until the creature grows up. Based on Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' classic novel.



To Kill A Mockingbird*

Set in Depression-era South, the two young children of a respected lawyer (Gregory Peck) encounter racism for the first time, as their

father defends a black man accused of a terrible crime. The film is leavened with summertime adventures of the siblings and their flamboyant neighbor-boy friend. Rosemary Murphy (pictured, with Philip Alford as Jem) co-stars.

To Sir, With Love*

Engineer (Sidney Poitier) takes job as teacher in tough inner-city London high school for a season. Filmed in the swingin' 60's and featuring Brit pop stars Lulu (who had a smash hit with the title tune) and The Mindbenders, the occasionally salty dialogue may seem tame to modern teens, but the situations are universal.

Up the Down Staircase*

Released the same year as *Sir*, this is the American variation of the theme, starring Sandy Dennis as a devoted young teacher in a second-rate NYC tenement school. A poignant, unrequited love story involving one of her girl students and an arrogant fellow teacher adds adult element, as does unwanted attention from a young thug Dennis attempts to mentor. Eileen Heckart adds a little humor as would-be hip fellow teacher.

War Games

Matthew Broderick plays computer whiz-kid who inadvertently starts World War III via his hack into a military computer. Exciting drama will keep you glued to the finish.

West Side Story*

High school seniors in New York City, half of them Puerto Rican, clash in Romeo and Juliet-based story of forbidden love. Tony (Richard Beymer) is a native Polish-American, Maria (Natalie Wood) his Hispanic sweetheart. Great soundtrack and wonderful dance sequences led this film to a well-deserved Best Picture at the 1961 Academy Awards.

When Worlds Collide

Another good introduction to science fiction, albeit a dated and not terribly inclusive one. Planet Earth is about to receive an unwanted

visit from a giant asteroid, predating *Armageddon*, et al. All the brilliant, white young people of the U.S.A. are rounded up to fly to a new Earth-like planet in another solar system. Campy dialogue and state-of-the-then-art special effects carry this one over. Starring Richard Derr and Barbara Rush.

Where Angels Go, Trouble Follows

Sequel to *The Trouble With Angels* is pretty good, though sans Mills. Stella Stevens takes over as hip young nun eager to shake up Roz Russell's world. Susan St. James plays a new student anxious to up the ante. A road-trip to a Catholic youth rally ensues, with plenty of cute meets with boys. Features Van Johnson as a progressive priest at a male academy.

Where the Lilies Bloom

Backwoods drama about orphaned children raised by teen sister (Julie Gholson) after their parents die. Based on true story, the lengths these kids go to keep their secret and stay together as a family is touching. Somewhat creepy element of oldest sister (Jan Smithers) marrying older man Harry Dean Stanton is especially off-putting in today's climate.



All photos from Wikimedia Commons.
(*) denotes adult themes.